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# SCIENCE

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FRIDAY, APRIL 9, 1897.

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## THE WAR WITH THE MICROBES.\*

FROM the moment that man made his appearance in the world there has been perpetual warfare between himself and everything animate and inanimate upon the earth. To a great extent this has been an aggressive strife, man's every effort being exerted to compel nature to contribute to his comfort, welfare and advancement by the subjugation of her materials and forces. It was many centuries, however, before he recognized that there were certain unknown insidious enemies, which often rendered fruitless his simple household occupations, defied his every effort at control and sometimes menaced even his well-being and life. Though in 1675 Leeuwenhoek discovered, with a powerful magnifying glass, certain minute organisms in decomposing animal matter, it was not until nearly two centuries later that their true significance was recognized, and Davaine first demonstrated the positive connection between these minute forms of life and disease. When animal and vegetable life ceased, in accordance with the laws of nature, they were supposed to be changed by purely chemical actions, so that their elements were again returned to the earth and air to supply food for other plants and animals. This destruction was considered to be wrought simply by the oxygen of the air, and the process of

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\* Address of the President before the Chemical Society of Washington, March 9, 1897.